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THE STRENGTH OF NUMBERS: ENUMERATING COMMUNITIES IN INDIA'S PRINCELY STATES*

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OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS AN INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE importance of numbers and figures has crept into our study of history. I am not referring to the so-called quantitative history which only feels free to make statements about the past if sufficiently buttressed with countable facts and data. What I mean is that historians have begun to realise that modern government methods of measuring and counting have affected the formation of new subjective identities. Bernard Cohn[1] has already drawn attention to the way colonial officials in India developed numerical classifications of castes and communities for reasons of administrative convenience. More recently Dipesh Chakrabarty argued that people adapted themselves to these bureaucratic classifications, as they realised that the numerical strength of their community had become an important political asset.[2]

In this short essay I will investigate how the collection of official and quantitative data affected group solidarities and inspired people from different castes and religions to compete for what they thought to be a 'fair number' of appointments in an ever-growing state bureaucracy. The focus will be on three Indian princely states – Travancore, Baroda and Hyderabad – and a related question will be whether the development of communal

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1 Bernard S. Cohn, 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture', in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 136-72.

2 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Modernity and Ethnicity in India', *South Asia*, Vol. XVII, Special Issue (1994), pp. 143-55 .

animosities in these semi-autonomous Indian states was any different from the communalism in the directly administered British territories.

Cohn was one of the first to point out that the official view of caste was closely related to how the British collected information about the caste system. A caste was viewed as a concrete and measurable entity. It had definable characteristics, such as endogamy, rituals, which could be found out with the help of questionnaires and quantified for ethnographic reports and surveys. Cohn quoted a 1901 government of India report which justified the effort and expense of ethnographic surveys on the ground that 'India is a vast storehouse of social and physical data which only need be recorded in order to contribute to the solution of the problems ...'[3]

Dipesh Chakrabarty, arguing along similar lines, is of the opinion that the most far-reaching and fundamental innovation that the British introduced to Indian society was the establishment of a modern state. But state and statistics are – not only etymologically – two sides of the same coin, and the most conspicuous symptom of that state's modernity was that its techniques of government were closely tied to techniques of measurement. The British had the length and breadth of India, her history, society and population, mapped, classified and quantified in detail, most dramatically so in the decennial Indian Census that began in 1872.[4] As the colonial state had defined India as a society made up by various religions and castes, these categories came to dominate the Census operations.

The counting of Hindus, Muslims and others became a critical political exercise when the British, gradually and hesitantly, began to include their Indian subjects in legislative bodies and the higher ranks of the services. What made this counting critical was that the British had decided to dispense political privilege like seats and appointments along lines of caste and religion. Whereas several authors allege that the colonial government was led by considerations of divide and rule, Chakrabarty admits that the British may have been prompted by a concern to be fair to the many caste and religious communities they had so scrupulously counted and measured.

However that may be, the official classifications and their quantitative content reconstituted the meaning of community. They imparted Indians with the important message that communities could be enumerated and that their number was politically important. Furthermore, their social and economic progress or backwardness could be determined by measuring their share in the number of graduates, official appointments and parliamentary seats.[5] I would like to add that these numerical classifications could also provide interested

3 Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

4 Chakrabarty, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

leaders with an argument to start political action in order to secure a larger share of these government benefits. Since a larger share for one community necessarily involved a relative loss to another, an increase in communal rivalry might be the final result. These communal incidents were extremely disadvantageous to the emerging national movement in India.

In its earlier manifestations nationalism, in India as well as elsewhere, was not aimed at the immediate establishment of an independent nation-state. Rather, the first nationalists questioned their exclusion from positions of power and demanded a larger participation of qualified Indians in the colonial administration. The 1833 Charter had made Indians eligible to all posts, but in the second part of the century they still had to fight their way up to the few leading positions open to them. The main beneficiaries of a cautious entrée to higher office were members of the traditional élite. Brahmans, realising that English education was the key to government employment, perpetuated their predominance under British rule and controlled the several branches of public administration.[6] Their call for an Indianisation of the services rallied the educated élite versus the colonial power in a well-arranged opposition of Indians *versus* Europeans. However, with the expansion of government services and the entrance of intermediate castes into schools and colleges, the Indian ranks became ridden by mutual rivalry for the few available positions. The claim for a rightful share was raised and here numbers came in as evidence to demonstrate a community's proud achievement or unjustified neglect.

The considerations presented so far, as is usual in so many studies in Indian history, almost exclusively pertain to the situation in British India, that is the territories under direct colonial rule. Yet, about two-fifths of Indian territory and somewhat less than one-fourth of the entire Indian population was part of Indian India, standing under indirect rule in states headed by Indian rulers. Somewhere in history these Indian states had entered into treaty alliances with the East India Company which had earned them a semi-autonomous existence on the fringe of the emerging British-Indian empire. They were allowed to maintain their own bureaucracies, to pass their own laws and to levy their own taxes, but had to give up all control over their external affairs. Strewn capriciously over the subcontinent, there were about six hundred of them, the majority tiny and insignificant but some, like Hyderabad with its own currency, post, railways and airline, much bigger than Britain. It was the Political Department, exercising the functions of the crown in its relations with Indian states, that held this motley collection of

6 P. Radhakrishnan, 'Communal Representation in Tamil Nadu, 1850-1916: The Pre-non-brahmin Movement Phase', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, no. 31 (1993), p. 1568.

princely states together.[7] The Residents appointed by that department were assigned with the delicate task to keep a watchful eye on the ruler's conduct but at the same time to observe scrupulously their dignity and states' traditions.

For people in the Indian states nationalism was a concept fraught with ambivalence. After the violent Mutiny (1857) the British refrained from further territorial annexations and decided to cultivate their relations with the remaining rulers as a conservative bulwark against the rising nationalist tide in British India. Feeling perfectly safe under protection by the British paramount power, these Indian rulers showed no willingness to part with their autocratic powers. Therefore, the political movements that emerged in the states reflected the wish of local élites for responsible government and a larger share in their own administration which was thought to be an authoritarian, if not feudal preserve.[8] Nationalism in that sense did not spread from British India to the states as a one-way political process, as Robin Jeffrey has asserted[9], but largely sprang from local roots and circumstances. As the states' administration was already in Indian hands, this movement rallied Indians against Indians and offered fertile soil for the emergence of communalism and its concomitant tensions and conflicts.

In my view, the distinctive characteristic of the phenomenon called communalism is the belief that a group of people, because they have one ascriptive identity in common, such as religion, language, also share common interests in all other fields (political, economic). By placing all emphasis on that shared cultural attribute, an earnest attempt is made to overcome a disturbing internal diversity by postulating a higher but largely 'imagined unity'.[10] Depending on the selection of attributes, the imagined unity may refer to the political community of a nation, but also to a religious, caste or linguistic community.[11] Defined in these broad terms communalism is not something peculiar to South Asia and may be compared with similar social phenomena studied elsewhere under different names like ethnicity, tribalism or pillarisation. Led by the same wish to lift communalism out of its narrow

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7 The Political Department, earlier Foreign and Political Department, produced the R/1 series of Crown Representative's Records (Oriental and India Office Collections, London), whereas the Residency Records in the R/2 series contain the files from the records kept locally by Residents and Political Agents.

8 When in 1939 the government of India decided to support some of the weaker rulers with troops and police, the struggle for responsible government may be said to have transformed into a direct struggle against British imperialism.

9 Robin Jeffrey (ed.), *People, Princes and Paramount Power: society and politics in the Indian Princely States* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 12.

10 Dick Kooiman, 'Communities and Electorates: a comparative discussion of communalism in colonial India', *Comparative Asian Studies*, 16 (Amsterdam, 1995), p. 2.

11 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983).

regional and cultural confines, Chakrabarty suggests that all these forms of intolerance be called by the more general term 'racism'.[12]

Remarkably, the Indian states are generally seen as rather harmonious as far as their communal relations are concerned. Judging from contemporary sources, Copland concludes that the baneful impact of communalism was less pronounced in princely India than in British India.[13] The same view is held by Sen who states that '... in Indian princely states of Hindu rajas and Muslim nawabs in modern times, there was serious militancy from time to time, but not so frequent and so many serious Hindu-Muslim riots'.[14] Was communalism something specific for British India and was it, as Jeffrey has argued in the case of nationalism, something imported from outside?

The Report of the Indian Statutory Commission suggested in 1930 that the comparative absence of communal strife in the Indian states might be explained by political retardation. So long as people had no part in the conduct of their own government, there was little for members of one community to fear from the predominance of the other.[15] Sen seems to follow the same line of reasoning when he argues that with the gradual introduction of divisive systems of elections and confrontational systems of government based on majority rule, communal conflicts have become progressively more frequent, also in the Indian states.[16]

A theory favoured by British officialdom was that the princely states were theocracies in which expressions of religious orthodoxy were forbidden and one religious group dominated the *darbar*.[17] That theory absolutely fails to convince, as one could easily argue the other way round: less privileged groups might feel tempted to appeal to community symbols in an attempt to share the power that they feel is unjustly denied to them, thus providing the conditions that sooner or later lead to communal conflict. That is also the position I want to take here. In substantiation of that point I will focus on the fight waged by several disprivileged groups for proportional representation in government services in Travancore, Baroda and Hyderabad.

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12 Chakrabarty, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-5.

13 Ian Copland, 'Communalism' in Princely India: the case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940, *Modern Asian Studies* XXII, 4 (1988), p. 783.

14 S.R. Sen, 'Communal Riots: Anticipation, Containment and Prevention', *Economic and Political Weekly* XXVIII, 15 (1993), p. 627.

15 *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission* (London, 1930), Vol. I, p. 29.

16 Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 627, 631.

17 Quoted in Copland, *op. cit.* (1988), p. 811ff.

II

Travancore was a Hindu state in the sense that the majority of its population was Hindu. Another reason to call Travancore a Hindu state is that in the eighteenth century one of its main founders, Martanda Varma, dedicated the whole kingdom to the Sri Padmanabha temple in Trivandrum, reconstituting it to a divinely sanctioned polity with the king as the vassal of his tutelary deity.[18] As the administration of the land revenues included the management of many temples and temple properties, only caste Hindus were ritually allowed to join the important Land Revenue Department. However, local brahmans were few in number and led a secluded existence on their landed estates. Therefore, the Travancore kings recruited a large number of foreign brahmans, mainly from Tamilnadu and Maharashtra, to run the administration.

This brahman preponderance in the services left several groups out which in successive waves raised a claim to their rightful share in the expanding administration. As early as in the 1880s Travancore students wrote articles in periodicals published outside the state criticising their own government for importing outsiders into the services in preference to the sons of the soil. Resentment about what was felt to be official neglect led to the famous Malayali Memorial (1891), asking the *maharaja* for a fair share in government appointments for the local people. As the results of the 1891 Census were not yet available, the memorialists referred to the 1889 *Travancore Almanac* for their complaint that outsiders were overrepresented in all services compared to their percentage of the population. Of the two hundred and forty-six top appointments carrying more than Rs 50 per month, foreign Hindus had one hundred and twenty as against local Hindus sixty-one. The remaining sixty-five posts were held by Christians. The memorialists argued that these groups were in no way 'entitled to play the Englishman in this state!'[19]

The 1891 Memorial for the first time raised the demand for a distribution of jobs on the basis of the numerical strength of each community. This meant that numbers entered politics as a forceful argument, long before there was any question of elections. Although the *diwan* (chief minister) rejected any notion of a proportional distribution of appointments, it did not prevent him from entering a vehement discussion about counting methods. Apart from enumeration, communal distribution also implied the problem of boundary demarcation. Hence memorialists and counter-memorialists made vigorous but inconclusive attempts to define Malayalis, using their system of inheritance or the particular way they wore their *kudumi* (tuft of hair) as

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18 Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: religion, state and society in Kerala, 1750-1850', *Modern Asian Studies*, XVIII, 2 (1984), p. 189ff.

19 The Travancore (Malayali) Memorial, *Madras Times*, 8 July 1891.

possible boundary markers.[20] I agree with Jeffrey and Suresh Kumar's more explicit view that this Memorial heralded the birth of communal politics in Travancore.[21] Yet, whereas Jeffrey mentions numbers only as an instrument meant to give the Memorial the more impressive appearance of a state-wide movement[22], in my view the more significant function of numbers was to indicate the relative strength of separate communities within the state.

Among the groups whose political aspirations found expression in the 1891 Memorial were first of all the low caste *ezhavas*. In 1895 they submitted a separate Memorial asking for the recruitment of more qualified *ezhavas* to the services. A few years later, they established the SNDPYogam, one of the first caste associations in India (1903). Christians were also involved in the 1891 Memorial. Travancore had an exceptional high percentage of them (thirty-one and a half per cent in 1931), for the major part Syrians who trace their origin back to the Apostle Thomas. The Syrian Christians enjoyed high status and carefully kept their distance from the lower-caste Christians, who were more recently converted by the numerous missionary societies working in Travancore. Nevertheless, the main instigators of the 1891 Malayali memorial were the *nayars*, an intermediate caste of landed warrior-aristocrats. They were also the main beneficiaries. Supported by their long tradition of literacy and government service, they silently found their way to promotion and recognition.

After the First World War the Syrian Christians together with the *ezhavas* organised a campaign for the opening of the public administration to all castes and creeds. After much pressure the government finally acquiesced in a separation of temple management from the Revenue Department, thus removing the ritual barriers that had until then prevented all but brahmans and *nayars* from entering this part of the services. This measure did not really improve the situation. Therefore, in the 1920s, aggrieved groups resorted to agitation against *nayar* predominance in the bureaucracy, and a Syrian Christian spokesman warned that power might easily turn into tyranny, if the various communities of the state were not duly represented.[23] To press the case of castewise representation detailed statistics were prepared that were eagerly discussed in the Legislative Council.[24]

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20 Travancore Memorials and Counter Memorials, *Madras Times*, 8, 9, 10 July 1891.

21 Suresh Kumar, *Political Evolution in Kerala: Travancore 1859-1938* (New Delhi, n.d.), p. 71; Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: society and politics in Travancore, 1847-1908* (New Delhi, 1976), pp. 166ff. Jeffrey's classic study has recently been reprinted by Manohar Publishers, New Delhi.

22 Jeffrey, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 167.

23 *Report of the Travancore Public Service Recruitment Committee 1933* (Trivandrum, 1934), p. 11.

24 *Travancore Legislative Council, Proceedings*, XV: 295, (1929) in State Legislative Library (SLL), Trivandrum.

In the 1930s numerical and communal classifications had become the standard idiom of Travancore political discourse. From all sides statistics were produced to claim political privilege on the sheer strength of number, and communities were grouped or split accordingly. In 1934 the *Report of the Travancore Public Service Recruitment Committee* brought to light that caste Hindus still accounted for seventy-five per cent of government servants, three times their share in the population, whereas *ezhavas*, as numerous as the *nayars*, made up only three or four per cent. Christians held 16.6 per cent of the jobs and the Muslim part was negligible. In the same year a Joint Political Congress submitted a Memorial to the *maharaja*, presenting Travancore's political problem primarily as a problem of numerical disproportions. Neat tables were displayed, listing the different communities' share in population and government service. The glaring imbalances thus disclosed, showing the same trend as the government report, were presented as a self-evident political program.[25]

To solve the problem of recruitment, the government committee had recommended grouping the population into fourteen communal categories and basing recruitment to the different grades of service on a mixture of communal representation and merit. The recommendations raised a storm of protest, especially after a defective version had leaked out through the press. The wave of commotion especially affected the Christians, though not for the same reasons. The more prominent Syrian Catholics objected to their separation from the low-caste Latin Catholics as an invidious move to reduce their share of Catholic appointments. Latin Catholics, in their turn, resented the loss of status implied by their classification with the depressed classes. And Congregationalists refused to be listed along with Anglicans. They declared to fear loss of identity, but the local missionary had a different story to tell: the Congregationalists feared that, if treated as one community, the plums of office and appointment would be taken by the most advanced section of the Anglican church which was Syrian.[26]

Echoes of the uproar in Travancore reached London, where it was almost inevitably perceived as a threat to the local Christian community by the Hindu government. Some personal letters to the Secretary of State in London deliberately presented the question in those terms by complaining that 'your brethren in Christianity are being persecuted like the Jews in Germany'.[27] Questions were asked in the British parliament whether Catholic Christians in Travancore were classified and treated as depressed classes to

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25 *Travancore: the Present Political Problem* (Calicut, 1934).

26 Account of Travancore Church Council meeting, Quilon, 1935, and letter by Eastaff, missionary Trivandrum, 10 July 1935, in Council for World Mission Archives (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), Travancore Correspondence, Box 33.

27 Personal letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, by M.N.Thomas and four million others, Madras 17 Mar. 1934, in Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC), L/P&S/13, 1291.

which the government could answer that the local converts themselves had claimed the right to be considered a depressed category for purposes of certain educational and other concessions.[28]

In 1935 the government of Travancore promulgated an order regulating recruitment to the various classes of service and their communal proportion. The principle of communal representation was accepted and for that purpose the new rules recognised eight Hindu caste groups, the Muslims and six Christian denominations. The Syrian and Latin Catholics were split into two distinct categories and the classification of Christian converts along with Hindus as Depressed Classes was abolished. The order introduced a three-tier division of administrative service with, in the higher division, efficiency as the primary criterion and in the lower division communal representation and rotation. Even after promulgation of this order *ezhavas*, Muslims and low-caste Christians kept complaining that the majority of key positions was still falling to the brahmans, *nayars* and prominent Syrians. Resolutions were moved in the Legislative Assembly urging the government to take steps to guarantee that all important communities in the state were properly represented in the secretariat. The heated discussions that continued to flare up disclosed the deep-rooted communal bitterness that prevailed among the various communities, but especially between Christians and *nayars*.[29]

III

Baroda, comprising a large part of the present Gujarat Province, was of similar size to Travancore. It had a comparable Muslim minority, but its Hindu majority was much larger (about eighty-eight per cent). The main difference from Travancore in the state's religious complexion was the negligible proportion of Christians.

Its formation also dates from the eighteenth century when the *Gaekwads*, a conquering war-band from Maharashtra, started to build their influence in this region. They defeated the local representatives of the Mughal empire, but proved unable to establish an unchallenged independence from the larger Maratha confederacy with its centre in the Deccan. When the British crushed the last vestiges of Maratha power (1818), the *Gaekwads* were forced to acknowledge British suzerainty.

Until far into the twentieth century Baroda offered a picture of overall political and communal tranquillity. Gandhi's civil disobedience campaigns starting from nearby Gujarat closely touched on Baroda's borders, but created

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28 This answer was in fact a quotation from a note by the Government of Travancore, 10th March 1935, OIOC, Crown Representative's Records (CRR), R/2(889/236).

29 Dick Kooiman, 'Political Rivalry among Religious Communities: a case study of communal reservations in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXVIII, 7 (1993), p. 292.

only ripples on its political surface. But Baroda had a weak spot in its socio-linguistic composition. Gujarati was the main language and only one and a half per cent of the population spoke Marathi as its first language. The concentration of this Marathi speaking minority in a few administrative centres and district headquarters reflects the history of the State. Maharashtrian brahmans, following in the wake of the *Gaekwads'* conquests, used to dominate the top levels of the state bureaucracy.

However, from the end of the nineteenth century, education made spectacular progress and in 1931 literacy had increased to twenty-one per cent (thirteen per cent in British Gujarat). As a result, the higher ranks of the Baroda administrative service were increasingly filled by Gujaratis. According to the Census, from 1875 to 1921 the Marathi share in the number of gazetted government officials had fallen from sixty-four to seventeen per cent, whereas the share of Gujarati Hindus and Jains had increased from twenty-four to sixty-two and a half per cent. The percentage of the Gujarati Muslims in the corresponding period had increased from two to fourteen per cent.[30]

In Baroda there were few demands for a more responsible system of government, and the distribution of appointments was not as eagerly watched as in Travancore. Hardiman explains this comparative peace by pointing at the large number of Gujarati *patidars*, the dominant landlord-cultivators, who after some form of schooling had smoothly settled in the bureaucracy, thus avoiding the usual conflict of new-administrators-*versus*-local-nobility.[31] Nevertheless, Hardiman underestimates the resentment many Gujaratis seem to have felt at what they considered to be an official neglect of their community by the Baroda government. In 1930s there grew at least a latent sympathy for the Indian National Congress among Gujarati Hindus who proved receptive to the slogan 'Gujarat for Gujaratis' associated with Congress policies. And with the approach of an Indian federation as devised by the 1935 Constitution, Congress began to show more interest in the affairs of the princely states. The Haripura Congress (1938) decided for the first time to support, at least to a certain extent, movements in the states asking for responsible government. Maratha officials, the British Resident wrote, felt uneasy about this growing sentiment.[32]

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30 Figures for 1875 are derived from David Hardiman, 'Baroda: The Structure of a 'Progressive State, in: Robin Jeffrey (ed.), *People, Princes and Paramount Power: society and politics in the Indian Princely States* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 118-19, but my own counts from the 1921 census differ from his. I have included *Prabhus* in the Marathi speaking category, since successive census reports describe them as immigrants from the Deccan.

31 Hardiman, *op. cit.*, p. 119ff.

32 Fortnightly Report (FR) from Baroda for the second half of Feb. 1932, OIOC, L/P&S/13/1007.

That feeling of uneasiness only grew. At the 1938 session of the Baroda *Praja Mandal* (People's Association), the Congress stalwart Sardar V. Patel managed to gain the leadership. In his presidential address he touched upon the sensitive issue of official employment by complaining that outsiders had been imported into the state and sons of the soil kept out of the administration. It was time, the Sardar concluded, that the voice of the people was heard and responsible government established.[33] The *Praja Mandal* had issued a pamphlet on the employment question and at the same meeting one of the secretaries read out from that pamphlet, that of the two hundred and eighteen top officers drawing a salary of Rs 300 or more per month seventy-one belonged to the state whereas one hundred and forty-seven were outsiders.[34] Without saying so explicitly, we may infer from his words that those who 'belonged' were Gujaratis and the outsiders were Marathis. The 1931 Census figures, for all their shortcomings, also showed that over the last decade the Marathi share of top level appointments had increased from seventeen per cent to twenty-four per cent, but this growth was largely achieved at the cost of the Muslims.[35]

In an open letter to *The Times of India* on 20 January 1939, B.Z. Panwala from Baroda countered that criticism. Entering upon the complicated problem of boundary demarcation, he contended that as many as twenty-five officers of the state had been wrongly described as outsiders. Also, drawing the line on the state service list at the lower level of Rs 100 per month, he pointed out that sixty per cent of the officers were Gujaratis; the remaining posts were occupied by Maharashtrians together with Parsis, Muslims and others. Marathis, according to him, preponderated only in the army and the household departments, while in the lower servives Gujaratis were alleged to claim more than eighty per cent of the posts.

When Patel visited Baroda city on the same 20 January, things came to a head dramatically. The Sardar was not popular among the Marathis and Muslims, and a general impression prevailed, spread by the Marathi press, that Patel as a Gujarati was bitterly opposed to the *maharaja* and his government. His tour through the city resulted in black flags along the route and the *pandal* erected for his reception by the *Praja Mandal* was destroyed. A terrorised Patel hid in the car and drove away as fast as he could.[36] The general meeting had to be postponed but his soothing words the next day did not have the desired result. Large-scale violence broke out and local

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33 *Bombay Chronicle*, 30 Oct. 1938.

34 Sessions of the Prajamandal Meetings 1928-39, Huzur Political Office (HPO), Baroda, Confidential File No. 129.

35 *Census of India 1921*, Vol. 17, Baroda State (Bombay, 1921), Part II, p. 114-21 and *Census of India 1931*, Vol. 19, Baroda State (Bombay, 1932), Part II, pp. 78-83.

36 Ian Copland, 'Congress Paternalism: the 'High Command' and the struggle for freedom in Princely India, c. 1920-1940', *South Asia*, VIII, 1-2 (1985), p. 130.

millhands, who were mainly Marathis and Muslims, joined the fighting, leaving many injured and one Maratha killed. During the riots a Marathi pamphlet circulated in the city stating that in the state services Gujaratis and Maharasthrians were employed without any partiality.[37]

In an open letter to *The Hindustan Times* on 28 January 1939 Sardar Patel tried to explain his position. Since the communal tension that had erupted in Baroda city was mainly attributed to his comments on the administrative services, he wanted to repeat that it was the people who claimed responsible government. Since the people 'could never be satisfied with a system under which most offices of responsibility were filled by people coming from outside Baroda State', they should insist on having them filled by local residents. At the same time, the Baroda *diwan* tried to prevent a public enquiry into the January riots. His argument was that publication of the available evidence would only result in increased bitterness between the communities and would hamper the common struggle of Gujaratis and Maharashtrians for the independence of India. The enquiry was dropped.[38]

IV

In the second half of the eighteenth century Hyderabad state was forced to accept Company military assistance in exchange for vast tracts of territory. This state, occupying almost the centre of the Deccan plateau, was carved out of the crumbling Mughal empire by a distinguished general who established the Asaf Jha dynasty. Yet, in spite of this dynasty's explicit assertion of independence, Mughal authority continued to be the source of symbolic legitimacy for the state.[39] The ideology of a Muslim state permeated the whole administration and E.M. Forster, coming from Dewas, wrote that he 'passed abruptly from Hinduism to Islam' adding that 'the change [was] a relief'.[40]

Nevertheless, Hyderabad held a much higher percentage of Hindus than Travancore: in 1931 eighty-four per cent. Muslims numbered no more than ten per cent of the population. Being to a large extent associated with the different branches of administration, they were over-represented in the urban population.[41] For a long time communal relations created no serious

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37 Report on the disturbances in Baroda from 20 to 22 Jan. 1939, by Sir V.T. Krishnamachari *Dīwān*, in HPO Baroda, Confidential File No. 134 and OIOC R/1/1/3282.

38 Disturbances Baroda City 1939, in HPO, Baroda, Confidential File No. 134.

39 Karen Leonard, 'The Hyderabad Political System and its Participants', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXX, no. 3 (1971), p. 570.

40 E.M. Forster, *The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings* (London, 1983), p.98.

41 The Muslim share of urban population was thirty-two per cent, the capital Hyderabad City numbering even forty-one per cent, *Census of India 1931*, Vol. 23, H.E.H. the Nizam's Dominions (Hyderabad, 1933) Part I, pp. 232, 245.

problems. First of all, Hindus and Muslims presented no solid monolithic blocs, but were internally divided by caste, language and sect. That apart, some non-Muslims managed to obtain leading positions, and government tried, wherever possible, to respect Hindu sensibilities. Also, the maladministration, regularly criticised by British Residents, may have created some solidarity among the victims, as Muslims and Hindus suffered alike from the *nizam*'s various schemes for extortion.[42]

According to Karen Leonard, the main problem in Hyderabad politics before independence was not the relation between Hindus and Muslims, but between *mulkis* (locals) and non-*mulkis* (outsiders). After the Mutiny (1857), trained Indian personnel was brought in from British India to improve the administration, but only Hyderabadis remained entrusted with the most important political responsibilities. From 1886, however, the Hyderabad Civil Lists show a steady increase in the number of non-*mulkis* in prominent positions. By the turn of the century this increase had led to an unmistakable statistical domination.[43] Of course, there was the inevitable tussle about definitions which was not definitely solved by government orders defining non-*mulki* as a transitional category. Slightly at variance with Leonard's thesis, I would like to submit the proposition that with independence drawing near the *mulki* versus non-*mulki* issue was gradually subsumed by a larger Hindu-Muslim divide. The majority Hindu population began to challenge its marginal position in the State's public life, especially its underrepresentation in the administrative services.

During the first half of this century Muslims benefited disproportionally from the expansion of the state's educational institutions. The Hyderabad general rate of literacy remained low, no more than five per cent of the population in 1931, far below that of Travancore and Baroda. Yet, from 1881 literacy among Muslims more than doubled, while that for Hindus increased by 0.4 per cent only. According to Leonard, the educational gap between *mulkis* and non-*mulkis* began to close. Another conclusion must be that the gap between Muslims and Hindus grew wider.[44]

In spite of an increasing association between *mulkis* and non-*mulkis*, also manifested in inter-marriage patterns, relations among Muslims were not altogether free from tension. Aligarh in North India continued to supply Hyderabad with more government servants than did local institutions, illustrating the continuing dominance of the original non-*mulki* administrators.[45] Hyderabad, the Resident wrote, lacked leaders of sufficient

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42 Memorandum by William Barton, Resident, 11 Dec. 1925, OIOC, R/1/1/1465(1).

43 Karen Leonard, 'Hyderabad: the Mulki-Non-Mulki Conflict', in Robin Jeffrey (ed.), *People, Princes and Paramount Power: society and politics in the Indian Princely States* (New Delhi, 1978), pp. 75ff.

44 Leonard, *op. cit.* 1978, p. 80.

45 *Ibid.*, 1978, p. 85.

stature and therefore, non-*mulkis* could argue that Hyderabad must continue to draw men from Upper India.[46] But another disadvantage was becoming more important: these foreigners brought with them many ties to the religious and political movements of North India which were increasingly divided along communal lines.[47]

One of the last voices raised against these imported government servants was that of Abid Hasan. In 1935 he had established the *Mulki* League, the main objectives of which were the introduction of responsible government and the reservation of the services to sons of the soil. In his *Whither Hyderabad?*, he made extensive use of the 1931 Census tables to show that educated employment was seized upon by immigrants from UP and Punjab who 'suffer from an unpardonable superiority complex... [and] act not as the servants but as the rulers of the state'.[48] As both Muslims from north India and Hindus from neighbouring British provinces were creating communal dissensions within Hyderabad, the author argued that capable *mulkis* ought to be found for every administrative and technical post, or that at least they ought to be given the chance to learn by experience. This undisguised challenge of all outside influence was embarrassing even for the *Mulki* League, and Hasan had to retire.

Recruitment to the services remained the dominant theme, but the communal boundary was increasingly drawn along the line of religion. Muslims controlled the government and enjoyed a disproportionate share of gazetted appointments: eight hundred and sixty-four out of a total of one thousand two hundred and twenty-one officers, or more than seventy per cent, leaving the rest to Hindus, Christians and Parsis. A Hindu communalist paper from Poona used these 1931 Census data to bring home to the Hindu public that their proportion of higher posts to population share was 0.002 only as against 0.06 for the Muslims.[49] But on the other hand, Hindus were well represented in the professions and dominated agriculture, trading and banking. The 1931 Census did not even mention trade as an occupation followed by Muslims.[50] For that reason, the *darbar* tended to consider the Muslim hold on the public services as a kind of justified compensation: since Hindus owned most of the private wealth of the State, 'there are few ways of livelihood left open to the Muslims except Government service...'.[51] And even there, they had to face Hindu competition.

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46 Secret Note by D.G. Mackenzie, Resident, 14 Jan. 1937, in OIOC, L/P&S/13/1200.

47 S.R. Ashton, *British Policy towards the Indian States 1905-1939* (London, 1982), p. 87.

48 Syed Abid Hasan, *Whither Hyderabad? (A brief study of some of the outstanding problems of the Premier Indian State)* (Madras, 1935), p. 44.

49 *Mahratta*, 10 Mar. 1939.

50 Hasan, *op. cit.*, p. 75; Copland, *op. cit.* 1988, p. 789.

51 Quoted in Copland, *op. cit.* 1988, p. 789-90.

The *Deccan Times* on 22 May 1938 took another line in defence of the Muslims. It pointed out that in Hyderabad and everywhere else government service, just like agriculture and industry, belonged to certain groups that possessed 'special flair' for that particular occupation. In Hyderabad, Muslims and brahmans were the two chief communities furnishing candidates for government service for generations. Brahmans constituted a negligible minority of two per cent, but held twenty per cent of gazetted offices and forty per cent of others. These brahmans who subjected Untouchables to inhuman treatment could not claim to represent the eighty-four per cent Hindus of the state. That claim, the paper wrote, would be tantamount to the ridiculous assertion that an eighty-four per cent representation in service should be reserved for them! The *Hindu Mahasabha* and *Arya Samaj* were denounced as exponents of this creed of brahman hegemony, which they were able to propagate because of the undue tolerance and leniency of the Hyderabad government.

In the 1930s tensions increased. There had been earlier communal disturbances, but in the late 1930s tensions came to a climax. Political associations, both inside but usually outside state territory, declared their unswerving loyalty to the *nizam*, but also requested the early introduction of political reforms. Branches of the *Praja Mandal* and National Congress were not in a flourishing condition, but in 1938 a Hyderabad State Congress (HSC) was formed for the attainment of responsible government under the aegis of the *nizam* by all peaceful and legitimate means.[52] The HSC condemned all forms of communalism and insisted that both majority and minority had a duty of establishing confidence and mutual co-operation. Nevertheless, resistance to government autocracy took a religious turn and Muslims were not eager to join. When in 1938 the HSC launched *satyagraha*, the *Arya Samaj* and *Hindu Mahasabha* started similar campaigns, posing as champions of the people by their demand for more democracy.[53] The involvement of communal elements in the *satyagraha* and even in the HSC itself led to an official ban on the HSC, since government was

> confirmed in its conviction that the movement, ostensibly political, [was] in fact a cloak for subversive, communal activities to which the prestige of the name 'Congress' has been deliberately attached for misleading the public.[54]

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52 *The Struggle for Freedom in Hyderabad State*, printed pamphlet (no place, 1938), pp. 19-21.

53 Swami Ramananda Tirtha, *Memoirs of Hyderabad Freedom Struggle* (Bombay, 1967), pp. 66ff.

54 Text of government ban in *The Struggle for Freedom in Hyderabad State* (no place, 1938), pp. 29-30. Further explanation was given by the Chief Minister's address to the Legislative, 23 Aug. 1938, OIOC, L/P&S/13/1200.

To lift the ban, communal leaders like Bahadur Yar Jung and Narsingha Rao started talks about the percentages of reservations for both communities in the services and the Legislative, but they remained inconclusive.[55]

Growing Congress interest in the states after its Haripura session and the approaching federation also made government view the HSC with alarm. The HSC, and Hindus generally, favoured the idea of federation, whereas Muslims and the *nizam*'s government regarded any transfer of power from the ruling class to more representative institutions as the passing of power into Hindu hands. These apprehensions, largely fed by a straight application of numbers, are very clear in Bahadur Yar Jung's presidential address to the 1940 session of the *Majlis-i-Ittihad-ul-Muslimin*. He denounced democracy as 'a counting of heads' and attributed Hindu fondness for that system to their wish to recapture power from the Muslims by their sheer weight of numbers. But the Western concept of democracy cannot possibly be applied to India, according to Yar Jung, as majority and minority have been fixed in the terms of Census figures which makes the Muslim minority a constant victim. He declared that Muslims would not tolerate any system which tended in the guise of democracy to hand over power to the Hindu majority.[56] The incorporation of Hyderabad into the larger Indian Union had to take place by force of arms.

V

What becomes apparent in this short essay on the enumeration of communities is the great deal of similarity that exists between the situation in the princely states and British India. Although nationalist discourse tends to connect the growth of communalism with British colonial policies – which as a matter of fact were much more prominent in the provinces than in the states – there seem to have been more fundamental factors at work. In both cases, a steady increase in number and size of government departments led to a demand for skilled personnel, which was not difficult to fulfil since the numerous products of modern education stood eagerly waiting outside the gates of government establishment. In British India the fierce competition for government employment not only stimulated a national movement, but ultimately came to split Indian ranks by mutual rivalry for position. In the states the same demand placed Indians in direct opposition against their own government. Therefore, political developments in the states may have

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55 Resumé of events in Indian States for this period, in OIOC, L/P&S/13/1200 File 1(2). See also N. Ramesan (ed.), *The Freedom Struggle in Hyderabad* (published by the Andhra Pradesh State Committee appointed for the compilation of a history of the Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh, 1966), Vol.IV, pp. 139ff.

56 Full text of Bahadur Yar Jung's Presidential Address, Jan. 1940, in OIOC, L/P&S/13/1201, File 1(3).

suffered from retardation, but any hint of a political devolution immediately made communal battle lines to be drawn.

In Travancore, Baroda and Hyderabad, political struggle was first aimed at a reservation of government jobs for sons of the soil. In this struggle the new, educated administrators imported from other parts of India, whether brahmans or Muslims, played more or less the same part as the white *sahib* in the British provinces. With their arrogance and superiority complex, they were seen as 'brown British', acting as rulers more than servants of the state. At first, the sons of the soil were loosely defined in broad categories as Malayalis, Gujaratis and *mulkis*, but later they were diversified into finer subdivisions of religion and caste. In this atmosphere of rivalry and distrust communalism could and did emerge. The *Diwan* of Travancore was of the opinion that his people were much more inclined to think in terms of communal identities than was usual in British India, and Jeffrey agrees by stating that communal politics in Travancore were among the bitterest in India.[57] That the strong communal feelings in this state produced hardly any violence suggests a level of sophistication which requires further explanation.

In the hunt for a larger share of government appointments number became an important argument. Communal feelings were sharpened in this process, not so much by the impact of British direct rule as by their techniques of measurement which the states imported as an external resource. In Census, Almanacs, Civil Lists and many administration reports, separate Hindu, Muslim and Christian identities were constructed not just into Anderson's well-known imagined communities but also and more directly into enumerated communities.[58] However, the official categories did not always work, at least not for long. Affirmative action by underlying groups could lead to further proliferation breaking the official constructions, a process similar to the growing subdivision of the Other Backward Classes category in India today. Therefore, enumeration stimulated the formation of collective identities, but communities also counted their own numbers and drew what they considered to be their own boundaries.

It was not necessary to import communalism from British India into the states, particularly not in Travancore and Hyderabad, where conditions for that kind of social tension had matured long before the twentieth century. However, it was certainly encouraged by the 1935 Government of India Act and the concept of federation embodied by it. This globalisation at the level of a subcontinent created a lot of uncertainty about one's place in a larger

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57 Note on a discussion between Sir C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar, *Diwan*, and Sir Bertrand Glancy, Secretary to the Political Department, 1938, OIOC, L/P&S/13, 1283; Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

58 Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia, 1993).

Indian Union which made people cling to identities of religion and caste also beyond the narrow borders of their own state.

Finally, the strong sense of numbers thwarted the introduction of democratic forms of government. Democracy was perceived not as an instrument for the creation of a more responsible society but as a system of government that assigns permanent power to the group largest in number. India is still grappling with that problem.